Saint Paul Planning Commission City Hall Conference Center 15 Kellogg Boulevard West

Minutes October 16, 2009

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, October 16, 2009, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Mmes. Donnelly-Cohen, Lu, Morton, Smitten, Thao, Wencl; and **Present:** Messrs. Alton, Gordon, Johnson, Kramer, Nelson, Ward and Wickiser.

*Spaulding.

Absent:

*Excused

Also Present: Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Tom Beach, Department of Safety and

Inspections; Allen Lovejoy, Department of Public Works; Allan Torstenson, Patricia James, Penny Simison, Luis Pereira, Kate Reilly, Sarah Zorn, Emily Goodman, Tia Anderson, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and

Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes October 2, 2009.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Nelson moved approval of the minutes of October 2, 2009. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Alton welcomed David Wickiser, who is soon to be newest commissioner. His appointment was approved by the City Council last Wednesday. Mr. Wickiser will be welcomed officially at the next meeting on October 30, 2009 when the city clerk will swear him in.

Chair Alton also announced that the Zoning Committee agenda and staff reports are posted online a week before the meeting, and he encourages any Planning Commission member not on the Zoning Committee to review the agenda and staff reports.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond reported that there has been an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision to approve the site plan for the Walgreens Drug Store on Ford Parkway. The appeal was filed by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 789 (UFCW). The public hearing will be at City Council on October 21, 2009.

Another item at City Council was the rezoning for East Mall Associates at 841 Grand. The Planning Commission had recommended denial, and just prior to the public hearing on October

7th the application was withdrawn.

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. (Tom Beach, 651/266-9086)

Two items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, October 20, 2009 – Health East Ambulance Facility, 799 Reaney Avenue. A new administration, vehicle storage and vehicle service facility.

International Market II, 249 Como Avenue. Renovate the existing building for commercial use and construct a new parking lot with 120 spaces.

NEW BUSINESS

#09-273-676 Abdalla Tobasi – Rezoning from B2 Community Business to TN2 Traditional Neighborhood. 857 Selby Avenue, NE corner at Victoria. (*Emily Goodman*, 651/266-6551)

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Morton moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the rezoning. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

#09-273-801 Grand Sub Station (857 Selby) – Variances of parking standards for setback from street (7ft. required, 4ft. proposed), number of spaces (20 required, 17 proposed), parking in front of building, and curb cut location. 857 Selby Avenue, NE corner at Victoria. (*Emily Goodman*, 651/266-6551)

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Morton moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the variances. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Commissioner Morton announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, October 22, 2009.

V. Comprehensive Planning Committee

<u>Study of Saint Paul Parking Requirements: Beginning of Public Discussion Phase</u> – Staff presentation will be given at the October 30th Commission meeting. (*Merritt Clapp-Smith*, 651/266-6547 and Tia Anderson, 651/266-6562)

Tia Anderson, PED staff gave a brief summary saying that in May of this year the Planning Commission initiated a study of off-street parking requirements, which Merritt Clapp-Smith and Tia Anderson have been working on. The study is considering a number of changes designed to implement policies in the new Comprehensive Plan and better match parking requirements to actual demand. Other goals include facilitating redevelopment and reuse of existing properties and simplifying the parking code overall. Ms. Anderson talked about the study schedule that was included in the commissioner's packets, which show the public meetings and specific stakeholder meetings for gathering initial public input and feedback. By the beginning of next year, they plan to work with the planning commission to request a formal public hearing on recommended parking code revisions.

Commissioner Donnelly-Cohen encouraged the planning commissioners to attend some of the public meetings. The public meeting on Wednesday, October 28th was rescheduled to Tuesday, November 10, 2009. The first public meeting is Thursday, November 5, 2009 at the West 7th Community Center.

VI. Neighborhood and Current Planning Committee

<u>Design Standards Zoning Amendments</u> – Approve resolution recommending Design Standards amendments. (*Luis Pereira*, 651/266-6591 and Allan Torstenson, 651/266-6579)

Luis Pereira, PED staff gave a power point presentation on the Design Standards Zoning amendments. He spoke about the citywide concern about the high number of vacant buildings and vacant lots and the need for requirements for infill new construction. The City Council formally directed the Planning Commission to study options for design standards for one and two family residential structures in January 2009, and in February the Council passed an interim ordinance with design standards initially developed by staff. The Planning Commission held two public hearings on May 22nd and June 5th of this year. Over the summer, the Neighborhood Planning Committee considered public testimony and the staff recommendations, as well as the interim ordinance. Mr. Pereira talked about the issues raised regarding the proposed building design standards zoning amendments. Public comments included the need for the design standards to stay away from ambiguity and subjectivity, which can be costly in terms of administration (staff) and time (applicants), and an impediment to architectural innovation. Comments also included the need for the standards to require adequate windows and doors on buildings, as well as avoid provisions that would inhibit green building techniques. Mr. Pereira explained all of the proposed changes that were being recommended.

Commissioner Wencl thanked the members of the committee for their faithful attendance throughout all of this and she also thanked Wendy Lane and Tom Beach, Department of Safety and Inspections; and Luis Pereira, Allan Torstenson and Donna Drummond, PED staff.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Wencl moved the Neighborhood Planning Committee's recommendation to approve the resolution. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Commissioner Wencl announced that the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting is on Wednesday, October 21, 2009.

VII. <u>Minnesota Statewide Freight & Passenger Rail Plan</u> – Presentation by Allen Lovejoy, Public Works staff. (*Allen Lovejoy*, 651/266-6626)

Allen Lovejoy gave an update on the Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan. Mr. Lovejoy said that there are three plans currently in play: The Statewide Transportation Policy Plan; Statewide Highway Investment Plan; and the Minnesota Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan. The Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan is particularly significant for Saint Paul, especially regarding freight facilities that have historically been important to the local economy and have created issues of noise and truck traffic. In addition, downtown Saint Paul is the hub for no less than 6 potential rail corridors and high speed rail from Chicago. In 2008 the state legislature mandated that Minnesota Department of Transportation do a passenger and freight rail plan for the state.

In February, 2009 Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which freed up substantial project funding for rail investments that must be spent quickly. So the Governor established a Rail Transportation Forum to advise the Commissioner of MnDOT on project priorities for the State. In July the Forum made a recommendation for two passenger rail applications to the federal government: Union Depot; and Upper Midwest High Speed Rail. The Union Depot project in particular looks like it has a good chance of being funded. But the funds have to be expended within 24 months, and the project has not yet been designed. Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority is the lead on the rehabilitation of Union Depot and must develop a project that can be designed and built within 24 months of the federal approval of funding. Mr. Lovejoy said that he has heard positive things about at least partial if not complete funding for the Union Depot. And yesterday, Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood toured the Union Depot and was impressed with what he saw.

Next Mr. Lovejoy talked about the Upper Midwest High Speed Rail Plan, and mentioned the importance of High Speed Rail to the regional economy and its competitiveness in a global economy. The Plan's freight vision includes improving the capacity and condition of primary railroad arterials to accommodate both existing and future demand, and to remove bottlenecks. He noted that freight rail becomes more important to our economy as gas prices go up. It is important to note that if gas prices rise, the second cheapest way to ship commodities is by rail (only barge is cheaper).

The Plan pledges to be "data driven", meaning that rail corridor studies already completed would be used to compare costs and benefits of potential new investments. However, methodology used for all those individual studies varied to such an extent that the conclusions are only marginally comparable. Nevertheless, given the pressure of existing and likely new funding for rail projects, MnDOT agreed to pursue completion of the Plan by year's end. He expects that the specifics of the Plan are likely to be updated in the near future with studies that use comparable methodologies.

Commissioner Thao asked Mr. Lovejoy about the Upper Midwest High Speed Rail corridor.

Mr. Lovejoy said that the specific analysis of the corridor between here and Chicago will look at a variety of things and use the same methodology for analyzing all three potential alignments: I-94 (Eau Claire); Hwy 61; and Rochester.

Commissioner Smitten wanted to understand government's responsibility in the construction and maintenance of freight rail. The railroad companies own some component of the lines and must have some responsibility and yet the state is responsible in a different capacity as well.

Mr. Lovejoy said that the land grant nature of the railroads in this country affords them special autonomy and control in terms of land use powers. The individual rail companies own the tracks that their trains run on, or they lease the rights from other rail companies. Government does not control nor own most freight tracks in the U.S. The freight rail haulers, the federal government and a lot of state governments agree that the state of the infrastructure is not sufficient for future needs and that the rail companies and government need to have expanded partnerships. There is a public good for having well maintained freight lines, and throughout the industry and government there is a growing awareness of the need for such partnerships. Lovejoy expects more federal money go to help rehabilitate the freight rail system.

Commissioner Ward asked if passenger rail will continue to use freight rail lines, with only high speed rail being on separate tracks and/or rights-of-way.

This is a big issue that has not yet been determined for each and every potential corridor. Mr. Lovejoy said that one of the determining factors is <u>volume</u>. As passenger rail increases in volume there will be increased conflicts with freight rail and more pressure to acquire adjacent rights-of-way. A second determining factor is <u>speed</u>. Slower passenger rail (under 79 mph) may coexist with existing freight rail alignments. Somewhat faster rail (79 to 110 mph) might coexist with selective realignment of curves. But high speed rail requires such large curves, that it is unlikely compatible with most freight alignments. In any event, the interplay of freight rail, passenger rail and high speed rail will need to be figured out on a corridor-by-corridor basis, rather than through a single policy/engineering approach.

VIII.	Communications Committee	
	No report.	
IX.	Task Force Reports	
	None	
х.	Old Business	
	None	
XI.	New Business	
	None	
XII.	Adjournment	
	Meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.	
Sonja l Plannii	led and prepared by Butler, Planning Commission Secretary ng and Economic Development Department, Saint Paul	
Respectfully submitted,		Approved(Date)
Donna Drummond Planning Director		Marilyn Porter Secretary of the Planning Commission

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